

EXHIBIT 9a

the New York Times

Group Says Politics Are Stalling New York City's Inquiry of Yeshivas

By Kate Taylor

April 6, 2016

A group representing parents and former students at ultra-Orthodox yeshivas accused the de Blasio administration on Wednesday of dragging its feet in investigating their schools, out of fear of alienating a constituency that the mayor has assiduously courted.

In July, 52 parents, former students and former teachers sent a letter to New York City's Education Department saying that 39 yeshivas were violating state law by not providing students, particularly boys, an adequate education in secular subjects like English, math and science. The Education Department said then that it would conduct an investigation of the yeshivas, located in Brooklyn and Queens.

But on Wednesday, the group behind the letter held a news conference in front of City Hall to express its frustration with the lack of any apparent progress in the investigation.

"It's eight months later, and there's no sign of a serious investigation taking place," Naftuli Moster, the leader of the group, Young Advocates for Fair Education, said. "In fact, all indications are that the D.O.E. is just stalling us. In the meantime, tens of thousands of boys — we estimate around 30,000 — are not getting a basic education."

The group's lawyer, Norman Siegel, a longtime advocate for civil liberties, said he believed the reason the investigation was stalled was that city officials did not want to cross ultra-Orthodox leaders.

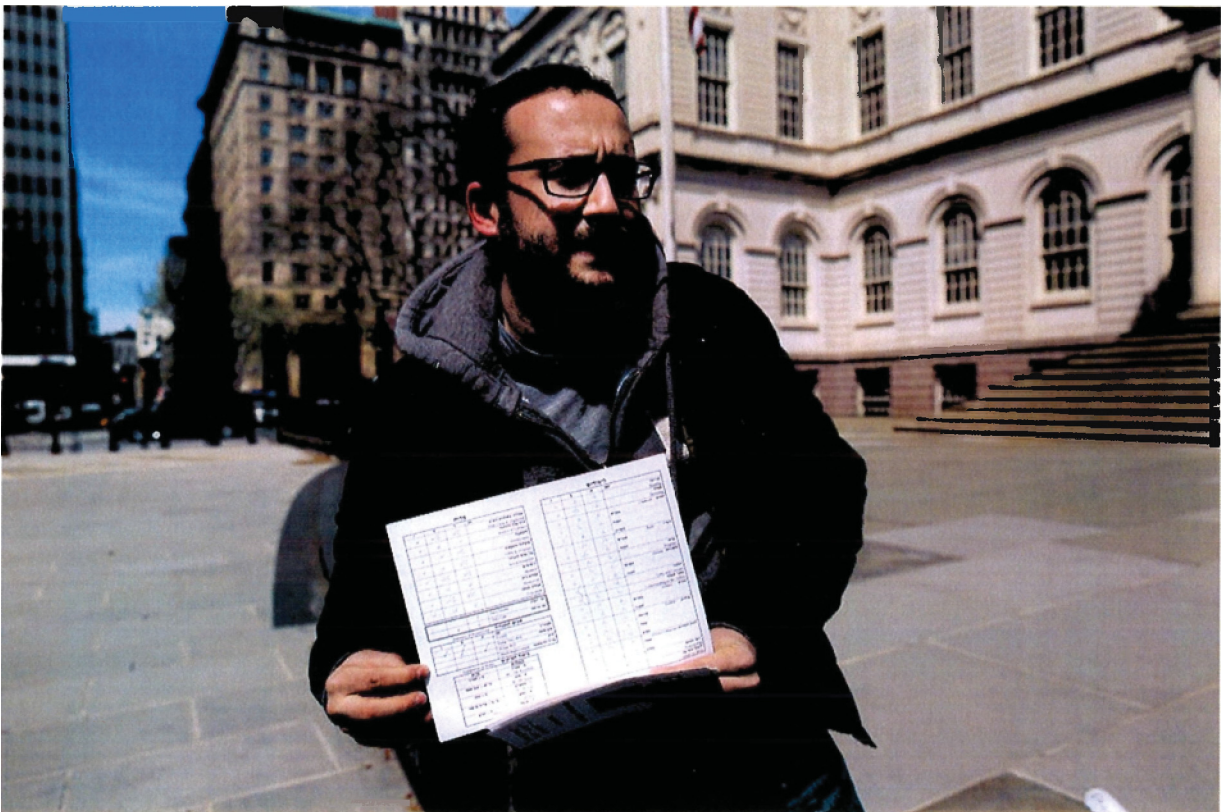
"It's about people putting politics over the rule of law," he said.

Under state law, minors in private schools must receive instruction "at least substantially equivalent" to that offered in public schools. The letter sent to the Education Department in July said that the 39 yeshivas did not meet that standard. Students between the ages of

7 and 13 received only 90 minutes a day of English and math instruction, four days a week, and had no instruction in science or history, the letter said. English instruction for boys stopped at age 13.

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Most Hasidic Jews speak Yiddish at home, and nearly a third of students in Jewish schools in New York City speak limited English, according to the Education Department.



Chaim Levin, 26, showed his third-grade report card, which listed marks in areas like prayer. He said he never learned algebra. Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

It is not the first time that civil libertarians have criticized Mayor Bill de Blasio, a Democrat, for what they see as kid-glove treatment of religious groups. In December, the New York Civil Liberties Union accused Mr. de Blasio of pandering to religious advocates by supporting a bill, which he later signed, that allows private and parochial schools to

hire security guards, at a cost to the city of \$20 million annually. The bill was supported by the Orthodox Union and other religious groups, including the Archdiocese of New York and the Islamic Schools Association.

Mr. Siegel said that politicians "don't want to touch the issue" of secular education in yeshivas because of their desire to retain support among ultra-Orthodox voters.

When asked whether political concerns had anything to do with the seeming lack of progress in the investigation, Austin Finan, a spokesman for the mayor, said in an email that the inquiry was "active and ongoing."

There is evidence to support the group's contention that the investigation has stalled, however. In July, Harry Hartfield, a spokesman for the Education Department, said that it was "in the process of finalizing a set of requests" that superintendents would send to the yeshivas in their districts. Last month, Mr. Hartfield, using the same words, told the neighborhood news site Patch that the department was "in the process of finalizing" the requests and would send them out "soon."

Mr. Finan said on Wednesday that it was "inaccurate" to say the requests had not been sent out, but declined to comment further.

Mr. Moster called on the Education Department to appoint full-time investigators to lead the inquiry, to be transparent about the investigation's progress and to make unannounced visits to the yeshivas to see what instruction they were providing. The department has suggested that it may conduct visits, but has not said anything more about them.

Chaim Levin, 26, who attended the news conference, said that when he was a child, his yeshiva, Oholei Torah in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, offered no English education at all. He showed his third-grade report card, which listed marks in prayer, the study of Torah and Talmud, Hebrew spelling, penmanship, Yiddish and Jewish history. He said he was now in his second semester of college and was hoping to become a lawyer, but that he was dreading having to take a math class, because he had never learned algebra.

A mother spoke about her concerns for her son's education, but asked to be identified only

by her first initial, S., because she feared a backlash from her insular community She said that her 9-year-old son attends a Hasidic yeshiva in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and that he was already losing interest in secular subjects because they were valued so little at the school.

"I think New York City is failing my kid," she said.

A version of this article appears in print on April 7, 2016, on Page A20 of the New York edition with the headline: Group Blames de Blasio as Inquiry of Yeshivas Lags

EXHIBIT 9b

Advocates for Brooklyn Yeshiva Reform Threaten to Sue Mayor

The city's investigation into educational standards at Jewish schools isn't moving forward fast enough, a group of advocates said Wednesday.

By John V. Santore, Patch Staff (<https://patch.com/users/johmsantore>) | Apr 7, 2016 4:18 am ET



WILLIAMSBURG, BROOKLYN — A group of activists accused the city Wednesday of deliberately failing to investigate allegations of inadequate education at Jewish schools in Brooklyn and Queens, and threatened to name the mayor personally in a lawsuit if the situation doesn't change.

Last July, the city's Department of Education (DOE) said it would investigate (<https://patch.com/new-york/windsorterrace/nyc-investigating-40-ultra-orthodox-schools-hbrooklyn>) whether nearly 40 Jewish schools, or yeshivas, were adhering to state education requirements.

State guidelines require (<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/inonpub/guidelinesequivofinstruction.html>) private religious schools to provide "instruction which is substantially equivalent to that provided in the public schools," but leave enforcement up to city's superintendents.

The DOE announced its investigation after Yaffed (<http://yaffed.org/>), an activist organization led by yeshiva graduate Naftuli Moster, sent a letter (<https://www.scribd.com/doc/305534753/Yaffed-2015-Letter>) to city officials claiming the schools in question were not adequately teaching secular subjects, including English.

The letter was signed by 52 yeshiva alumni and parents of current students, Moster said.

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When Patch recently questioned (<https://patch.com/new-york/williamsburg/city-dragging-heels-orthodox-jewish-schools-investigation-critics-say>) the DOE about the investigation's progress, department spokesman Harry Hartfield shared few details. He would say only that the investigation was "ongoing" and that the DOE would "soon" send requests to schools for information regarding their curricula.

Hartfield said the same thing (<http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/new-york/nyc-yeshiva-probe-doe-still-closed-book>) to The Jewish Week, an NYC-based Jewish newspaper, last August. However, he told Patch it would be incorrect to conclude the DOE hasn't worked on the case since then.

Moster, head of Yaffed, said Wednesday that he doubts this claim.

"There's no sign of a serious investigation taking place," Moster said at a press conference held in front of NYC City Hall, backed by a group of Yaffed supporters. "What has the DOE done for the past eight months?"

Yaffed attorney Norman Siegel described the city's approach to the issue as "an outrage." He accused elected officials of avoiding it because they're afraid of losing Orthodox Jewish votes.

"It's about people putting politics over the rule of law," Siegel said. "They don't want to touch this issue at the expense of thousands of Jewish boys."

While many yeshivas aren't effectively educating either boys or girls, Moster said, girls will sometimes receive more secular instruction, due to a belief in the community that women should focus less on religious studies.

Although Yaffed's members would rather avoid court, Siegel said, they're willing to take legal action against the city if the DOE doesn't change its investigative approach within the "next few weeks."

Any suit the group will name Mayor Bill de Blasio as a defendant, the

attorney said.

Assemblywoman Deborah J. Glick (<http://assembly.state.ny.us/mem/Deborah-J-Glick/comm/>), chair of the Assembly's Committee on Higher Education and the only elected official at the event, noted that as mayor, de Blasio has direct authority over the DOE.

"The mayor has been great on education," Glick said, praising the city's universal pre-K program (<https://patch.com/new-york/bushwick/bunch-politicians-visited-public-school-123-bushwick-today-o>). "But with that comes this responsibility [to make] the DOE do their job."

Glick said she sent a letter (<https://www.facebook.com/yaffed.org/photos/Pb.344930932219792.-2207520000.1459975526./io7o3oo469682831/?type=3&theater>) to de Blasio earlier this year expressing concern about yeshiva education, but hasn't heard back.

Fantastic News! Look who will be joining us for the press-conference tomorrow at 12 pm on the steps of City...

Posted by Yaffed (<https://www.facebook.com/yaffed.org/>) on Tuesday, April 5, 2016 (<https://www.facebook.com/yaffed.org/posts/m7o3o234634931o>)

"The mayor believes strongly that every child in our city deserves a first-rate education," de Blasio spokesman Austin Finan responded Wednesday. "The DOE's investigation of these schools is active and ongoing. The assertion that DOE has not sent requests for information to schools is inaccurate. We will not comment further on an ongoing investigation."

The DOE did not respond to Patch's request for comment.

Mordechai Levovitz, executive director of the non-profit LGBT support group Jewish Queer Youth (http://www.jqyouth.org/our_team.shtml) (JQY) and a Yaffed backer who attended the Wednesday presser, said he personally received a quality education at a yeshiva in Far Rockaway, Queens.

However, Levovitz said he's noticed that many yeshiva students who come to JQY for help cannot communicate effectively in English.

"When you deny a child a basic education, you're denying them the ability to understand themselves," Levovitz said. "In any other community, that's called child abuse."

Also present Wednesday was Chaim Levin, a graduate of Oholei Torah (<http://www.oholeitorah.com/index.php>) in Crown Heights. He said the school provided him with no secular classes and no instruction in English between the ages of 6 and 16.

He showed Patch a series of report cards he was issued in third, fourth, and fifth grades—from 1998 through 2000. The cards only listed classes that had been taught in Yiddish or were directly related to Jewish studies.

Levin said his nephew currently attends the school, and that its curriculum hasn't changed.

"You have kids right now who are not learning a word of English, not math, not science, not history, not geography," he said. "It's a catastrophe."

Oholei Torah's website puts its student population as 1,850. A call Wednesday requesting comment from school officials was not immediately returned.

Levin said many members of Brooklyn's Orthodox Jewish community have "no job prospects."

They "can't go to college," he said, "because they [don't] know anything about math or know how to write a paragraph. And what is happening to these young guys? They're on drugs, they're homeless, because they have nothing. They have no foundation."

A woman at the press conference who declined to give her name, fearing retribution, said her 9-year-old son, who attends a yeshiva in Williamsburg, receives just a few days of science instruction per year.

"He's losing his love of learning," she said, adding that he's just one in a community of kids "growing up with a mentality that education is not important."

Moster and Siegel said the woman's fear of retribution is common among her peers. Yaffed's leadership believes this fear has silenced many more Orthodox community members who would otherwise side with the organization.

Despite his accusations against 38 yeshivas in Brooklyn and Queens, Moster has kept the names of the schools private. He said Wednesday that he would prefer to work with them, rather than against them, to promote reform.

Siegel agreed. "There are yeshivas doing what the law requires," the attorney said. "Why can't all yeshivas do it?"